

# R21m urban renewal project left to rot

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A R21m, multi-purpose urban renewal project started in 2009 with the intention of creating business opportunities in the Eastern Cape stands empty and crumbling.



Dilapidated buildings that were meant to be a public park in Ocean View, Jeffrey's Bay. Photo: Joseph Chirume

Residents of Ocean View in Jeffreys Bay say the Kouga Municipality failed to complete the multi-million rand Ocean View Neighbourhood Centre. The buildings are dilapidated and taken over by weeds. Dirty water leaks from broken pipes. Vandals have stripped the doors, windows and water taps.

Meant to create jobs and beautify the small suburb of Ocean View, where unemployment and drug abuse are prevalent, residents fear the ghost of a place will be used by criminals.

In 2009, then Kouga executive mayor Robbie Dennis said the project would entail upgraded street lighting, a paved walkway from the CBD to Ocean View, a play park for children, outdoor recreational facilities such as braai spots for families, a taxi rank and stalls for hawkers.

"We want to build communities of which residents can be proud. We won't rest until what is happening here, happens in every township across Kouga," Dennis said in 2009.

Ocean View resident Velaphi Ngolose said, “The buildings were never opened to the public, despite that some were [already] roofed. They looked smart and clean in the first days. We are also puzzled as to what happened, because the structures started to deteriorate due to lack of maintenance and proper care. The braai area is a complete mess, while there is stinking water from the buildings.”

A taxi driver, who wanted to remain anonymous, said, “These crumbling buildings give Jeffreys Bay a bad reputation. Tourism is the main economic revenue-generating industry here, but all the successive municipal administrators did not bother to complete the project.

“We are losing business because the taxi rank is an open space ... It rains often here and the wind is not that friendly; passengers often go to Humansdorp where there is a better taxi rank. We hope the new mayor will take up our case.”

Sabina Mokoetsi said she had planned to sell meat and wood to park-goers. The 61-year-old grandmother said, “I was excited at the prospect of running a braai business when the park was being constructed ... I ended up going back to the farms to look for a job.

“I am old now; I should settle at my house and only come out at weekends to sell meat and wood. Unemployment is high here. The park could have opened invaluable opportunities to the people of Jeffreys Bay, because the place is always swamped with visitors.”

Current Kouga Municipality executive mayor Elza van Lingen said, “The Ocean View Neighbourhood Centre was championed by the ANC-led council as a quick wins project in 2009. The project was clouded in controversy almost right from the start. The community for whom the centre was being built was never actually consulted as to what they wanted to see offered at the centre, and the contractor was unable to provide all the necessary health and safety documentation for the work that was done. Consequently, an occupation certificate could not be awarded and the centre could not be taken in use.”

She said, “The centre is one of the critical issues we would like to address. ... The matter of the occupation certificate needs to be sorted out. The site is not really suitable for the recreational facilities that were put in place as it is right by a busy road. The council will be looking at identifying a different site where for example, a play park could be developed.”

Asked for comment, ANC Kouga Municipality region said the current leadership were not able to comment as they were not involved at the time.

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